

# State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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Testimony of Rick Tanasi, President State Vocational Federation of Teachers

Appropriations Committee  
February 16, 2010

## **RE: Funding for CTHSS**

Dear Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and Committee Members

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the vocational high school system. We have been and remain the premier vocational school system in the country. However, our students have become increasingly short changed when it comes to the learning opportunities they have been provided. Our system has been built on the motto "learn by doing" – what students are able to do is determined by the materials they are provided. As funds have diminished, teachers and administrators have been keeping the system afloat, but we are beginning to sink.

We are thankful for the bonding and funding for new renovations in some of our buildings. However, many of our buildings have not received any renovations and are now in conditions that are detrimental to learning. Students and teachers continue to deal with unhealthy indoor air quality, crumbling facilities, and broken machinery. Even our new buildings, despite their beautiful façades are plagued with unfunded repairs and uncompleted sections. New and costly equipment sits unused because there is no money available to provide adequate electrical systems.

The present budget crisis has only exacerbated years of underfunding. Over the past decade trades have seen their budgets cut in half and now must rely on production work to subsidize the materials needed to provide true vocational education. However, even their ability to do production work is compromised by buses that are often 15-20 years old. Funding requests for buses have gone unheeded long before the current financial crisis began. Teachers now face the difficult choice of overlooking safety hazards on the buses or refusing production work that is necessary to keep their shop funded and operational.

This lack of funding impacts not only our trades but our academics. An academic department head is asked to support Science, Math, Art, and Computer classes for 750 students on a total budget of \$3000. State mandated curriculum changes come with no additional money for the required books. Too often teachers and administrators must reach into their own pockets to pay for necessities in both academic and trade areas.

We realize that the reputation of the CT technical high school system is such that you may have believed that everything was operating smoothly. You may not have known about Masonry

departments without sand, Electrical departments without wire, Carpentry departments without lumbers, and Plumbing departments without tubing. You may have known about the CTHSS commitment to increase assessment, but not known that schools have no paper to print the tests or the lack the materials needed for state mandated science experiments. You may have seen the increased participation in sports and recognized how that has positively impacted recruitment, but not known that sports are threatened by the budget. You may have seen our new buildings, but not known that there are only a few maintainers to keep it clean and operable. You may have known that computers have been provided, but not known many lack the necessary software so that students must sit two or three [at one computer] resulting in frustrated or bored students.

Our system has passionate teachers and students that want to be in our schools. They deserve the commitment from the state to give them the funding that many of our city students take for granted. I respectfully ask that this committee look to adequately fund our schools and thus develop the future of our Connecticut workforce.